The Papua Besena Movement: Papua Dainai, Tano Dainai, Mauri Dainai

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This is a draft of a Chapter which will appear in a forthcoming volume entitled Micronationalism in Melanesia, edited by R.J. May.
Papua Besena is an anti-colonial movement. It is a reflection of a Papuan consciousness which is rooted in culture and history and has been sharpened by a sense of political and economic dissatisfaction.

The historical background

One nation or two.

In 1884 Papua – then known as British New Guinea – was declared a British Protectorate. Following the federation of the Australian states it became a territory of Australia and was renamed Papua.\(^1\) The former German colonial territory of New Guinea was mandated to Australia by the League of Nations in 1920 and subsequently became UN territory under Australian trusteeship. Up till the second world war administration of the two territories was kept quite separate but following a period of wartime joint administration, in 1949 the two were joined in an administrative union as the Territory of Papua and New Guinea, though the UN Trusteeship Council was given an assurance that the union would not jeopardize the separate judicial status of the mandated territory (Van der Veur 1966:154).

Prior to colonization there was little contact between people from different parts of the country, though some trade links, such as the hiri and kula expeditions, had existed for hundreds of years. Movement of people began after colonization but was restricted within the two territories: Papuans moved and worked within Papua and New Guineans within New Guinea. This separateness was largely destroyed by the second world war and the subsequent formal amalgamation of the two territories. After this 'enterprising Papuans began to migrate New Guinea, something they had never been able to do before, and there too, thanks to their better schooling, to mop up the best jobs'.\(^2\) But there was still little real integration of the people of the two territories, except perhaps within the public service and in some aspects of town life.

One of the most tangible manifestations of the historical separation of the territories is that each developed its own lingua franca: Hiri Motu in Papua and Pidgin in New Guinea. Pidgin, 'which is sometimes displayed as a distinctive badge of the New Guinean' (Nelson 1972:19), is seen by

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\(^1\) It is interesting to speculate on whether Papuan separatism would have developed as it has if the territory had retained the name 'New Guinea'.

\(^2\) Chatterton, in *Pacific Islands Monthly*, October 1973:25
Papuans as an inferior, bastardized language; as Abaijah told an Australian television interviewer, 'Now as far as Papuans are concerned Pidgin is a kanaka language - that's what the Papuans say'. Its alleged inferiority notwithstanding, however, the Pidgin language seems to be spreading among Papuans, educated and uneducated, especially in the urban areas where there is a growing New Guinean population.

There is also a certain emotional content in Papuan consciousness. Papuan journalist Pauline Bona has suggested that Papuans think of themselves as Papuans in a way which the people of larger and more diverse New Guinea do not think of themselves as New Guineans, and English born missionary Percy Chatterton, a long term resident of Papua, has written:

The name Australia has an emotional content for dinkum Aussies, and even for a long expatriated pommie like myself there is magic in the name England. We cannot be surprised, nor have we any right to be contemptuous, if the name Papua has in 70 years acquired an, emotional content for those whose homeland it is.

The reasons for this are not easy to identify, but perhaps have something to do with the different colonial experiences of the two territories.

Papuans generally had a milder colonial experience than did their New Guinean counterparts:

Members of the Papuan Government Service were said to be dedicated men with notions about treatment of Papuans which could more appropriately be held by missionaries and anthropologists. New Guinea officers were younger, more braah, more militaristic, had more formal education, and were less sensitive to the needs of the people they governed. The white planter community and the Returned Soldiers' League were far more influential in New Guinea than in Papua. (Nelson 1972:23)

1 Pacific Islands Monthly, September 1973:4

2 Pacific Islands Monthly, September 1973:26
Sir Hubert Murray's long governorship of Papua undoubtedly had a lot to do with this and contributed indirectly to Papuan unity.

The long benign regime of Lieutenant-Governor Sir Hubert Murray (1908-1940) helped to make Papuans less truculent than New Guineans, who suffered greater land alienation, harsher labour recruitment, more corporal punishment and more racial discrimination under both the Germans and the Australians. (Griffin 1973b:6)

In Murray's own words:

I think that the difference is that we cultivate a feeling of 'mateship' or camaraderie between European and Papuan, and they deliberately do not. I have heard a resident of New Guinea boast that their Native policy was superior to ours, and give as an instance the fact that we play cricket with Natives, which they would consider beneath their dignity. (Nelson 1972:23)

The beginnings of Papuan separatism

As late as the 1960s the Australian government's policy with respect to the future status of the two territories was still ambiguous, though it had become pretty clear that earlier proposals for Papua's becoming a 'seventh state' of Australia were no longer realistic and that the two territories would proceed to a joint independence.¹ In the meantime the formal situation existed that while New Guineans were Australian protected persons, Papuans were Australian citizens and British subjects (though they still required entry permits to enter Australia).

During the course of the second House of Assembly (1968-1972), doubtless moved by the prospect of national independence, Papuan members showed a consistent concern for the status and identity of Papua and Papuans.

¹ The confusion of Australia's policy on the subject is outlined in Griffin (1973a:104-6; 1974:13-15). As Griffin has commented (1976:27), 'Miss Abaijah is correct if she accuses Australia of muddle and deceit in its dealings with Papua'.

In November 1970 the member for South Fly, Ebia Olewale, told the House that '... the days are coming when you can expect some disturbances, such as an uprising in Papua ... instead of concentrating on certain parts of the country for development purposes, let us have uniform development'. Olewale was supported by the member for Alotau and Speaker of the House, John Guise (now Sir John Guise, governor-general), who in October 1970 spoke of 'Resentment among Papuans ... caused by the fact that virtually nothing was being spent in Papua compared with development fund allocations for New Guinea' and in December (following a visit to Papua by the Australian minister for external territories) said that the Papuan people were on the brink of a general revolt against the Australian government and its policies. These sentiments prompted Olewale to form a short lived pressure group called Papua Action. The aim of this group was to establish contact with other Papuan MHAs and local government councils in Papua and to gauge their feelings on such issues as the status and identity of Papua and the sort of development it was getting relative to New Guinea. However the group received little support from villagers or councillors (Stephen 1972:143). About this time also Papuan members were involved in the establishment of an Under-Developed Districts Party which was established to press for a 'fair go' for the less developed Districts.

In March 1971 there was a heated exchange in the House when the member for Moresby, Percy Chatterton, speaking in Motu, unsuccessfully moved an amendment to exclude Papua from a motion introduced by the highlands-

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1 HAD II(12), 13 November 1970, p.3555. Olewale's reference was to the policy of development proposed by a World Bank mission report in 1964 (see IHRD, 1965:35 and the commentary on this policy by Schaffer 1966).

2 Sydney Morning Herald, 17 October 1970

3 Post-Courier 17 December 1970

4 Chatterton, personal communication, May 1975

5 Founding members were V.B. Counsel (MHA for Western and Gulf Regional, in Papua), Norman Evenett (MHA for Esa’ala, Papua) and Peter Johnson (MHA for Angoram, New Guinea).
based United Party which called for the transfer of UN trusteeship to some other country if the Australian Labour Party won the approaching Australian general elections.¹ "... what Papuans want", Chatterton said, is to 'remain under the Government of Australia until such time as Australia gives us self-government'.

Shortly after this the member for Western and Gulf Regional, V.E. Counsel, circulated some seventy questionnaires to local government councils and a cross-section of Papuans scattered throughout the Territory to ascertain Papuan views towards unity with New Guinea. Although the sample was narrow and the questions somewhat loaded, Counsel's survey indicated strong separatist sentiment, 54 per cent of the forty replies received by the end of May 1971 voting against union at any time.² Counsel subsequently moved a motion requesting the Australian government 'not to take any action that would alter the existing status and rights of Papua and Papuans without the express approval of the Papuan people or their elected representatives'. '... if we cannot be Australians', Counsel said, 'then we want to be Papuans - citizens of Papua'.³ Replying to this the Deputy Administrator said:

I am authorised by the Minister for External Territories Mr C.E. Barnes, to reaffirm that it is the policy of the Australian Government to advance Papua New Guinea to internal self-government and independence as a united country...... In practice the difference of legal status between the inhabitants of Papua on the one hand, and New Guinea on the other has been of little consequence since the approval by the United Nations of the Administrative Union in 1947.

¹ HAD II(13), 18 March 1971, pp.4093-4. In January 1971 the leader of the opposition in the Australian parliament, R.G. Whitlam, had visited Papua New Guinea and promised that if the Labour Party was elected in Australia (as in 1972 it was) Papua New Guinea would be granted immediate self-government.

² HAD II(14), 31 May 1971, p.4157-8; the Questionnaire is reproduced in Stephen (1972:130)

³ HAD II(14), 1 June 1971, p.4174

⁴ HAD II(14), 1 June 1971, p.4175
Notwithstanding this, (indeed perhaps assisted by it) Counsel's motion (with a minor amendment) was carried by 30 votes to 25.\(^1\)

In June 1971 the House of Assembly invited an Australian parliamentary mission to visit Papua,\(^2\) but the Australian minister for external territories (G.E. Barnes) declined. Instead it was agreed that delegation of Papuan ministers would visit Canberra. The delegation, led by the member for Central Regional, Oala Oala Rarua (in 1976 Papua New Guinea's high commissioner in Australia), met with the Australian government in October. Olewale dissociated himself from the group and Guise refused to accompany the delegation but supported its objectives in a letter to Barnes. The delegation called for increased investment in Papua's development (including a Purari hydroelectric scheme and a copper mine in the Western Province) and argued for the establishment of regional authorities. It gained little but the promise of an expert study of less developed areas.\(^3\)

In September 1971 Counsel and Olewale unsuccessfully moved amendments to a motion endorsing a revised national development programme; they called for political development to be deferred until such time as the Papuan people had been consulted as to their wishes through a referendum.\(^4\)

Counsel told the House:

\(^1\) United Party members from the (Papuan) Southern Highlands District voted against the motion; on the other hand it was supported by such New Guinean members as Michael Somare, Julius Chan, Thomas Kavali and Kaibelt Diria (all, in 1972, ministers in the coalition government) and by Bougainvillean and East New Britain members.

Nine days after this the House passed, without debate, a seemingly contradictory motion, moved by a member from the Southern Highlands, which called on the Administration, the Australian government and the UN to find a way to abolish the present boundary between Papua and New Guinea (HAD II(14), 10 June 1971, pp 4359-60).

\(^2\) HAD II(14), 4 June 1971, pp 4261-3; as first introduced the motion sought a visit by a UN mission.

\(^3\) See Post-Courier 29 October 1971. The proposed study, which included less developed areas in New Guinea, was carried out early in 1972. See Economist Intelligence Unit (1972).

\(^4\) HAD II(16), 7 September 1971, pp 4688-9 and II(20), 16 November 1971, pp 5249-50.
...there is a great deal of dissatisfaction in Papua at the moment and unless we at least make a show of protecting Papuan interests then we will be faced with secessionist movements which will grow more and more militant as time goes on .... I think it is a deliberate invitation for the Papuan people to start acting up the way the Tolais have been doing in the Gazelle.

And shortly before the session closed Oala Narua told members (somewhat naively) that if arguments between political parties were to happen, Papuans might as well hang on to the Australian citizenship: 'There is nothing to stop Papua being a seventh State of Australia'.

Outside the House, in August 1971 it was announced that a new political party, the Papua People's Party, was to be formed in Port Moresby as offshoot of the Bereina Association, a Mekeo organization. A party spokesman expressed concern that Australia would leave Papua to be dominated by New Guineans and said that Papuans had to have spokesmen in the House of Assembly who could express the views of the Papuan people. It was hoped that the party would contest the 1972 general elections but in the event nothing more was heard of it.

In all these movements, the emphasis was on getting a 'fair go' for Papua, especially with regard to economic development - not on separatism as such. Olewale and Oala Narua were avowed nationalists and even Counsel explicitly rejected secession, describing his June 1971 motion as 'not secessionist, neither is it separatist'. The threat of separatism was just below the surface but in 1971 it was tied up with conceptions of a special relationship between Papua and Australia which was becoming increasingly unrealistic.

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1 HAD II(20), 19 November 1971, p.5314.

2 Post-Courier 27 August 1971. The Bereina Association was founded by James Eki Mopio.

3 HAD II(14), 1 June 1971, p.4174; also see Counsel's letter to the Post-Courier 1 June 1971. He did, however, have reservations: see, for example HAD II(14), 31 May 1971, pp. 4157-8.
Surprisingly, Papua separatism was not a prominent issue during the campaign for Papua New Guinea's third general election in 1972, except in the Central Regional electorate where Josephine Abaijah, in one of the most effective campaigns of 1972 elections, strongly advocated Papuan nationalism, the protection of Papuan rights, and a fair go for Papua and the Papuans. Abaijah won the seat, with a margin, on the first count, of more than 9,000 votes over her nearest rival, and as a member of the third House of Assembly, and in letters to the Post-Courier, she continued to press these demands.

One of Abaijah's election slogans, said to have been prepared by a number of Papuan women who now hold high positions in the public service, stated

**VOTE 1 J.M. ABAIJAH**

Papua Dainai - Tano Dainai - Mauri Dainai

Literally this means 'Vote 1 J.M. Abaijah, for Papua, for its land, for its way of life'. In another advertisement Abaijah said

I am Papuan. That makes me different from other people .... I am visible and identifiable and in danger of becoming a rejected and defenceless middleman .... The Tolais want to get rid of the Papuans as quickly as possible ... the Highlanders want to keep the Masters until they can take one themselves ... and the Bougainvilleans regard Papuans as a special brand of Redskins who are lording it over them today and expect to be kept by them tomorrow .... There should be no talk of unity with any country while Papua is hopelessly underdeveloped and ruthlessly economically suppressed.  

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1 See Post-Courier 13, 24, 31 December 1971, 7,14 January 1972, 11,17,18 February 1972

2 Abaijah, personel communication, 1975

3 Post-Courier 24 December 1972
Abaijah called for a 'fair go' for Papua, saying I would like to work for the reversal of the policy of the economic suppression of Papua.\(^1\) and

If the policy of the economic suppression of Papua continued or if there is a move to shift the Capital Port Moresby to another country, I will immediately start a Disunited Party. This is likely to produce quicker and better results than any goodie goodie approach to a desperate political, social and economic situation. Also as Port Moresby has been held up by administrators and government alike as being Papuans' share of the present financial bonanza, if we find out that we have been tricked or swindled then we should stand up and fight to get out money back so that we can spend it on the development of Papua. If Port Moresby was connected by a good road system with the rest of the country and with New Guinea it would always be the best site for the capital of Papua New Guinea .... But this advantage was the result of a deliberate policy of the economic suppression of Papua! which can be readily reversed by a change of policy.\(^2\)

The call for a fair go economically was supported by Chatterton who, in campaigning for Abaijah, said, 'Balanced development is an essential preliminary to meaningful and lasting National unity'.\(^3\)

**Papua Besena**

**Establishment and objectives**

Following her election to the House, Abaijah organized several meetings in Port Moresby and surrounding villages to demonstrate against political unity with New Guinea. At these meetings she urged that Papua remain an Australian territory, and Papuans remain Australian citizens, until Papuans were ready to take over the independent government of their own country.

\(^1\) *Post-Courier* 14 January 1972

\(^2\) *Post-Courier* 17 February 1972

\(^3\) *Post-Courier* 28 January 1972
'New Guineans', she said, 'would be welcome in Papua but as guests and visitors and not as lords or masters or as landowners'. More specifically Abaijah said that New Guinea highlanders were a threat to Papua; they were land hungry and aggressive people and were a threat to Papuan lands and Papuan social institutions. In an address to a University audience in Australia in mid 1972 Abaijah said that blood would have to be shed before Australia would take any notice of Papua and added, 'The Highlanders are being humiliated and showed today but .... If present trends continue traditional payback is inevitable.'

Papua Besena was formed at one of these meetings in Port Moresby on 3 June 1973. Abaijah was instrumental in its formation and immediately assumed leadership of the movement. In her words, 'I was obvious choice for a leader in 1973 as I was the only person in authority who was publicly speaking out on Papuan issues'. According to Abaijah (1975) Papua Besena is an anticolonial movement; it is not a political party.

Papua Besena has been variously translated (from the Motu) as 'Papuan tribe' - which as Chatterton says is ethnologically nonsense - and Papuan nation. In fact its membership includes a diversity of ethnic groups, including some who have more in common with the people of the New Guinea mainland than with those of coastal Papua.

To the extent that Papua Besena began with clearly defined objectives they were to press the demands which had been made by Abaijah during the 1972 election campaign and expressed subsequently at public meetings, and to promote consciousness of Papuan identity.

Initially Abaijah did not see herself as an advocate of separatism. In September 1972 she (somewhat surprisingly) gave the keynote speech on national unity at the first National Day celebrations in Port Moresby.

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1 From report of a meeting at Tubusereia village, Post-Courier 7 May, 1973
2 Post-Courier 5 June 1973
3 Post-Courier 23 June 1972
4 As early as April 1972 Abaijah had announced intentions of establishing Papua Besena. See Age (Melbourne) 3 April 1972
5 Abaijah personal papers, 1975
And as late as the end of 1973 she wrote, 'Papua Besena is not a separatist movement ... It is an anticolonial movement against New Guinea as a 1973 version of an imperialistic colonizing power'. At the same time she maintained that Papuans should retain their Australian citizenship and that Papua should have no political union with New Guinea.

Her position seems gradually to have changed. Chatterton (1974:113) has written

With the election behind her, Miss Abaijah soon made it clear that by a fair go for Papua she meant the re-separation of Papua from New Guinea and its preparation for separate independence.

In August 1974 she wrote, 'the present government is more colonially orientated than the past government was. The primary objective of the black Government and their white colonial advisers is to retain power in the hands of those who wish to establish a new colonial institution in this country'. Later the same year she said that Papua Besena had one fundamental objective and that was 'to make Papua a free independent nation and make the Papuans free people and masters of their own lives'. And in April 1975 she told a seminar at the New Guinea Research Unit in Port Moresby:

The aim of Papua Besena is to wipe out all forms of colonialism in Papua - white colonialism and black colonialism - and to achieve a free and independent Papua for the Papuan people. Papua is achieving its aim by freeing the minds of the Papuan people from the colonial slave mentality and the feeling of inferiority given to them by their Australian colonial experience ... with the economic and political development of Papua any political union with New Guinea would be an impossibility. (Abaijah 1975:1,9)

1 Post-Courier 2 January 1974

2 Abaijah, however, insists that though they may have been stressed differently at various places and times, 'The aims of Papua Besena have always been the same and have never been changed' (Abaijah, private papers 1975).

3 Post-Courier 7 August, 1974

4 Abaijah, private papers, November 1974
On the question of Papua's relationship with Australia Abaijah has been somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand she has been bitter in her attacks on Australian colonialism. In a letter to the *Post-Courier* in 1974 she spoke of 'Australia's vicious meddling in Papua's affairs and its arrogant, militant sanctions against Papua', and in 1975 she said:

Australian money, since the joint administration, has been used to destroy Papuan self reliance and make Papua economically and politically dependent on New Guinea .... Australia's story has been a continuation of ... neglect and disinterest in Papua .... The self interest of Australia is why Papua became an Australian Territory and the self interest of Australia is the sole reason why we are now being dumped as a dependent colony of New Guinea and forced into a political union with that country. (Abaijah 1975: 7,812-13)

More recently (Abaijah 1976:20) she has accused the Australian government of 'grooming Mr Somare as the Idi Amin of the Pacific'. On the other, as late as 1975 she continued to demand that Papua remain an Australian territory, with Papuans having Australian citizenship, and she has made several trips to Australia to seek Australian support for Papua Besena. An undated leaflet produced by Abaijah (reproduced in *Davis* 1974) shows her holding a koala and carries the message 'Papua is a natural trading partner of Australia'.

In supporting claims to independence Papua Besena has argued that Papua has rich land and sea resources; listed amongst these are the potential of a Purari hydroelectric scheme, a copper mine in the north of the Western Province (Ok Tedi) and oil and natural gas in the Papuan Gulf. In 1974 Abaijah reacted sharply to statements by John Kaputin and Fr John Momis opposing the Kennecott Corporation's investment in Ok Tedi; Papua Besena, she said, wholeheartedly supports the development of Ok Tedi by Kennecott.  

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1 *Post-Courier* 29 March 1974. Also see *Post-Courier* 13 June 1973

2 One commentator has spoken of 'an almost millenarian thinking when people talk of the potential wealth of Papua' (*Davis* 1974:11).

3 *Post-Courier* 8 February 1974
And when in 1975 Kennecott withdrew after the breakdown of negotiations with the government over the terms of its investment, Abaijah was strong in her criticism of the central government.

Organization

Organizationally Papua Besena claims to be amorphous. It is said to be a fundamental and essential part of Papua Besena that it keeps no records, writes no names and does not divulge its membership. Although it does have an executive council which meets regularly it has no other formal organizational structure and members are said to have no particular status.

As noted above, the leadership of Papua Besena was assumed naturally by Abaijah when the movement was formed. According to Abaijah (private papers, 1975), however, 'Anyone who likes can lead Papua Besena. Many people go to the Districts to work as Papua Besena leaders. However they have to establish themselves as leaders. We do not give them any particular status'. Notwithstanding this she is particular about her own role:

Nobody will challenge my leadership in Papua Besena. If they stick to the same aims of Papua Besena then they will become co-workers. If their influence is stronger than mine then I would be their strongest supporter but no future leader can take away from me that leadership status connected with the past events as these are part of my personal life and experience. (Abaijah, private papers, 1975)

Abaijah was born in the Milne Bay Province of Papua, though her parents now live in the Northern Province; she went to high school in Australia and is a diplomate in health education from London University. At the time of her election to the House of Assembly she was principal of the Institute of Health Education in Port Moresby. She had not taken part in politics previously.¹ She claims that people from the Central Province, particularly the Rigo and Mekeo areas, asked her to stand as a candidate in 1972 and

¹ For a more detailed biography of Abaijah see Membrey (1974) and Abaijah's own 'curriculum vitae' in Post-Courier 17 December 1971.
that her experience as a community development officer in the villages assured her victory.

The names of two expatriates - Chatterton and Dr Eric Wright - have frequently been linked with Abaijah's leadership of Papua Besena. Chatterton, the former MHA for Moresby, supported Abaijah in her 1972 election campaign and subsequently helped to choose the name Papua Besena for the movement. But he has not taken an active part in the movement, having advised Abaijah that it should be an entirely indigenous show, organized and led by Papuans. In 1975 Chatterton told a National Broadcasting Commission interviewer:

> I'm very careful to avoid any direct involvement because this has got to be a Papuan movement and I don't want Gough Whitlam saying it is inspired by the Europeans which he is so liable to do with separatist movements .... I think this is something they've got to work out for themselves. I continue to have great interest in it but I avoid getting involved not because I don't want to be involved, I would like to be involved but I think it would be a bad thing for them for me to become involved.

Wright, a long term resident of Papua and member of the Port Moresby City Council, had in 1972 known Abaijah for about ten years; the two had worked together in the Department of Public Health where Wright was an assistant director. In 1972 Wright became Abaijah's political adviser and as such was instrumental in the formation of Papua Besena and in the formulation of its policies. Subsequently he provided secretarial and technical assistance to Abaijah and helped in the preparation of various

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1 He was in fact her campaign manager. Chatterton (1974:113) has written of this

Miss Abaijah had behind her an impressive educational record, including study in Australia, in the Philippines, in India and at the University of London, and she was campaigning on a 'fair go for Papua' platform which appealed to me. However the Australian newspaper which credited me with financing her campaign was wide of the mark. I was now an old age pensioner, and it was all I could do to finance myself. Such moral support as I was able to give Miss Abaijah may have been worth a few hundred votes to her, but certainly not the 10,000 by which she outdistanced her runner-up in the seven candidate contest. That was her own achievement.
Papua Besena papers (including submissions to the Australian government). Wright accompanied Abaijah on a visit to Australia in 1973 and appeared on television. On his return he was charged with breaches of the Public Services Ordinance for his political activities in relation to Papua Besena and in August 1975 he was deported. In view of his close association with Abaijah one might suspect Wright of exercising a corresponding influence on Papua Besena; Abaijah is defensive on this point:

... Wright [is] like many other Australians or expatriates [who] have a lot of influence on many other Papua New Guineans as well. Papua Besena Movement does not rely on Wright ... it would not make much difference to Papua Besena if Wright was in Port Moresby or Sydney. If the United Party and Pangu Pati have their white expatriate advisers, why can't Pauans ...?''

Whatever influence Wright might have exerted over the movement, there can be no denying the continuing strong leadership of Abaijah, though many have questioned its direction. One critic has said,

'She gives no indication of being able to organise a coherent political movement and ... her scripts, speeches and letters to the press are inclined to be garbled and strident (Griffin 1975:12).

However such criticism perhaps imputes to Papua Besena a more mechanistic view of its role than the movement itself has ever intended.

During its first year of existence Papua Besena held about one hundred formal meetings, mostly at Abaijah's office in the Port Moresby suburb of Moresby. At these meetings, which were attended by Pauans from many different communities, the movement's policies evolved.
Shortly after the establishment of Papua Besena it was announced that the movement had decided to form an active political wing, to be known as the Papua Party, with the following aims: Party members to contest every seat in any future elections in Papua; Papua to remain an Australian territory and Papuans to remain Australian citizens until Papua forms its own government; and an economic development plan to be prepared for Papua. Later in 1973 Abaijah called for the formation of a Papua Besena youth organisation, to be known as Papua Pioneers. There was also talk of establishing a Papua Rural Reconstruction movement and a body to be known as Papua Investments. But nothing seems to have come of these.

Lacking a formal organization structure, Papua Besena works through masses of people and uses existing institutions and organizations. According to Abaijah this provides a 'feedback mechanism' through which the movement keeps constantly in touch with what is happening in the community.

Among the groups with which Papua Besena has formed some visible association are the Social Workers' Party of Papua New Guinea, the Papuan Black Power Liberation Movement, the Papua Group and the Papuan Republican Fighters' Army.

The Social Workers' Party of Papua New Guinea was established in May 1973 with the stated objective of fighting for a strong and viable socialist Papua New Guinea. It was said to represent rural and urban workers, villagers and students. The party's president, Laki Laya, secretary,

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1 In October 1973 the Papua Democratic Union was established with the same objectives, but shortly after its name was changed to Papua Party 'because the village people insist', Abaijah said, 'that the name of the party should closely resemble Papua Besena so that they will not be confused'. (See Post-Courier 26 October 1973 and 14 November 1973). The party does not seem to have had any active existence, however, until its revival in 1976 (see p.34).

2 Post-Courier 25 June 1973

3 Post-Courier 2 January 1974
Peter Kowo, and full time industrial organizer, Manu Raho, were all Papuan and in a statement of the party's objectives - which included regional autonomy - Kowo said 'the Social Workers' Party of Papua New Guinea has most strongly supported the principles of the Papua Movement' (i.e. Papua Besena).  

The Papuan Black Power Liberation Movement was formed (initially as the Black Power Movement) in September 1973. Its first president, Leo Charles Kavaua, subsequently became an adviser to Abaijah. The movement's objectives include the protection of the freedom, rights, history, prestige and identity of the Papuan people. It embraces 'all dedicated Papuans who are against a unified Papua New Guinea' and 'strongly encourages Miss Josephine Abaijah, the leader of the Papua Besena Movement in her efforts to create Papua as an independent Nation'. Disagreements within this group led to the establishment of a breakaway Papuan Liberation Movement, with James Eki Mopic (president of the Mekeo Local Government Council) as president and Paterson Kila as secretary. At one time this group planned to form a Liberal Party as an opposition to a Papuan government, if one were created. Despite their differences, however, Kavaua and Mopic were united in their support of Abaijah and Papua Besena in demanding an independent Papuan nation.

Towards the end of 1973 Abaijah agreed to a proposal by the Papuan Black Power Movement to form a Council of Papuan Affairs. The broad objective of the Council was to provide a common forum for all Papuan organizations, including Papuan-based churches, local government councils, Papuan student groups, Papuan Black Power, Papua Besena and such groups as the Kabisawali Association and Nemea Landowners' Association. Nothing appears to have come of this move but the Papua Group was formed early in 1974 and seems to have

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1 Post-Courier 4 July 1973; as against this, Laya planned a protest march against Papua Besena and sought support from students at the University of Papua New Guinea and the Administrative College. The march was, however, called off when only a few people turned up for it.

2 Kavaua, personal communication 1974; also see Post-Courier 25, 26 October 1973 and 7 January 1974
assumed a similar role to that proposed for the Council. The establishment of the Papua Group followed elections for the Port Moresby City Council, in which most of the successful candidates were Papuans.\(^1\) A press release issued by Abaijah\(^2\) announced, 'Papuans in the newly elected Port Moresby City Council have formed a Papua Group to control the Council'. The group elected a central executive, consisting of ten councillors,\(^3\) and subsequently added a working committee comprising the executive and some prominent Papuans from outside the Council, James Mpio, Thomas Kekeao, Aroa Geno (former councillor and in 1973 provisional president of the Papua Democratic Union), Gosas Damena, Henry Sape (a Southern Highlander) and Boio Daro, the only woman member. Subsequently it was announced that 'the Papua Group consists of Papua Besena, the Social Workers' Party, some members of the Port Moresby City Council, the Papua Black Liberation Movement, village and church leaders'.\(^4\) The more general objectives of the Group were listed as 'immediate provincial stage government' for Papua; legal aid from Australia; and a Papuan regional local government conference in Port Moresby, to be financed by the central government, to discuss the first two demands. A meeting between the Papua Group, Papuan ministers of the central government and the chief minister was arranged in late 1974 but the meeting, which was brought to a premature end when the Chief Minister had to leave for another appointment, achieved little. The disappointment which this occasioned led to a hardening of attitudes by the Group, which subsequently gave its full support to Papua Besena in its call for a separate Papuan nation. Kavaua, the Group's secretary, said, 'Let's be like African countries which are neighbours — separate but friendly ... force might be used to achieve the aims ... if political tactics fail'.\(^5\) In the subsequent history of Papuan separatism, Papua Besena and

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1 In fact Papua Besena influence in the Council was strong even before this - so much so that early in 1974 the New Guinea associate town clerk, Peter Malala, felt 'forced' to resign from his position (Post-Courier 20.21 February 1974). Malala (who became national chairman of the People's Progress Party) was elected to the Council in 1974 and in June support a Papuan separatist motion (Post-Courier 19 June 1974).

2 Post-Courier 11 April 1974

3 Iaau Tau, Frank Griffin, Amarty Paterson Kila, Sevese Morea, John Torresheba, Renagi Renagi Lobia, Gavera Kwara, Leo Kavau, Robert Ito and Emmanuel Alabriel.

4 Post-Courier 6 November 1974

5 Post-Courier 29 November 1974
Papua Action frequently acted in collusion; indeed it is sometimes difficult to differentiate the activities of the two groups. Towards the end of 1974, however, antipathy developed between the two and in November Abaijah told the chief minister that he was wasting his time 'carrying on the force' of discussions with the Papua Group. She described it as 'a phony splinter group that has no following' and as being 'loaded with Government agents'. The Papua Group seems to have faded out some time during 1975.

Meanwhile the Port Moresby City Council itself continued to be a source of support for Papuan separatism. In June 1974 the Council passed a motion calling for separate independence for Papua; in December 1974 it expressed opposition to the location of the national capital in Port Moresby, and in February 1975, after hearing an address by Simon Kaumi, it passed a motion supporting a unilateral declaration for an independent Papuan Republican government. This action clearly irritated the central government which threatened to abolish the Council, an attack which (as a threat of suspension) was repeated in August when the Council proposed to use its funds to send a delegation overseas to publicize the cause of Papuan independence.

The Papuan Republican Fighters' Army was created as a wing of the Eriwo Development Association in the Northern Province by Simon Kaumi, following Kaumi's suspension from the public service for political activities against the coalition government in 1974. In January 1975 the Papuan Republican Fighters' Army seized an expatriate owned plantation near Popondetta; of

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1 Post-Courier 26 November 1974
2 Post-Courier 19, 20 June 1974
3 Post-Courier 19 December 1974
4 Post-Courier 26 February 1975
5 Post-Courier 27 February 1975
6 See Post-Courier 27 February 1975, 29 August 1975 and Abaijah (1976). In the event only Abaijah and Wright went.
7 For a brief account of these developments see Post-Courier 15 October 1974, 15, 16, 17, 21, 28 January 1975 and 16, 25 February 1975.
this event Abaijah said.

The bloodless, peaceful coup of the Northern District is a most important symbol and model for Papua Liberation from colonialism and return of all Papuan lands to the Papuan people. (Press release 11 February 1975)

Kaumi was a strong advocate of Papuan separatism and was reported as saying that if efforts to return Papua to Papuans failed, his people would set up a Northern District Republic. He claimed (almost certainly untruthfully) that branches of the Papua Republican Fighters' Army were in training in Port Moresby, Kerema, Daru, Alotau and Popondetta. Kaumi formed a strong association with Papua Besena; he accompanied Abaijah on visits to the Rigo area of Central Province and in February 1975 was invited to address a meeting of the Port Moresby City Council. In the same month it was announced that he was appointed chief minister of a preparatory Papuan government: a press release from Abaijah (dated 8 February 1975) stated.

The executive of the Papua Besena at a meeting last night, gave full support to the appointment of Mr Kaumi as the provisional Chief Minister for the Republic of Papua. It was decided that the title President be replaced by Chief Minister of the Republic of Papua as the President of the Republic of Papua will only be chosen by the Papuan people in free, democratic elections.

Among other groups with which Papua Besena has had a tangible association is the Koiari Association, an ethnic group representing the people who live in the mountains behind Port Moresby. Early in 1973 Abaijah supported the Koiari people in their demands for a separate local government council and in May 1974 she took a prominent part in a demonstration during which the Koiari people presented to the Electricity Commission a list of demands.

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1 Post-Courier 17, 21 January 1975
2 Cf. Post-Courier 7 February 1975
3 See Post-Courier 19 April, 1973 and 1 June 1973. A Koiari Local Government Council was established in June 1976. Those attending the opening ceremony included the governor-general, prime minister, leader of the opposition, minister for provincial affairs, and Abaijah and Mopio.
relating to the Commission's use of Sirimumu Dam, which is on traditional Koiari land.\(^1\) There have also been contacts between Papua Besena and the Nemea Landowners' Association.

The Papua Besena movement has expressed itself mostly through mass meetings and demonstrations. Amongst its early efforts at mass mobilization were the organization of a march following the football riots in Port Moresby in 1973 (see p. 26); a demonstration in early 1974 which culminated in the burning of an effigy of the Australian prime minister;\(^2\) a demonstration against alleged police brutality during an incident at Koki in Port Moresby;\(^3\) and an aggressive demonstration by women, in mid 1974, demanding higher wages for their husbands and price control on consumer goods; during this last demonstration (to which riot police were called) some damage was done to government offices, and ministers and senior government officials were jostled and punched.\(^4\) Also, on 1 December 1973 - the proclamation of self-government for Papua New Guinea - Abaijah organized a Papuan self-government celebration at which the Papua Besena flag was raised.\(^5\) Soon after she threatened a demonstration during a royal visit.\(^6\)

In subsequent demonstrations and rallies Papua Besena has usually been one of several groups involved.

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1 See Post-Courier 17 May 1974

2 Post-Courier 28 January 1974

3 This demonstration resulted in an official enquiry. See Post-Courier 24 April, 1974

4 The 1974 women's riot is recalled in Somare (1975:133-4). Somare says he felt 'as though Papua Besena were trying to use street politics and inflation to bring my government down'. At the time Somare accused Abaijah of 'total irresponsibility' and of hoping for a woman or child to be seriously injured 'so that she can have a martyr for her cause'. (Post-Courier 13, 14 June 1974).

5 Post-Courier 3 December 1973

6 Post-Courier 25 January 1974
In addition to these demonstrations Abaijah has made several trips to Australia and a world trip (with Wright) in an effort to gain overseas support for the movement and recognition of Papua's independent status — without much apparent success. In 1975 Papua Besena opened an office in Sydney, to be managed by Wright.

Papua Besena also appears to have engaged in business ventures, through acquisition of a service station, vehicles and trade stores and through making small loans to members.¹

The development of separatism
Given the informality and the complexity of Papua Besena's relations with other groups, and internal conflicts among such groups, it is difficult to distinguish clearly the role of Papua Besena in the more general development of Papuan separatism between 1973 and 1975. On several issues it is difficult to assess precisely where Papua Besena stood and it is clear that Papua Besena both influenced and was influenced by the activities of other groups. Nonetheless it is clear that within this period the Papua Besena movement moved progressively from an explicitly non-separatist to an unambiguously separatist position.

Towards the end of 1974 a delegation from Papua Besena and the Papua Group, led by Abaijah and Mopio, presented a petition to the Australian high commissioner calling on the Australian government not to permit the forced unity of Papua with New Guinea; Papua, they said, should exist as a nation in its own right.² In reply the Australian government reaffirmed its decision to hand over independence to a united Papua New Guinea and to channel aid through the central government, and it dismissed requests for assistance for a delegation from Papua Besena and the Papua Group to visit Australia and to travel within Papua New Guinea (the last, it pointed out, was a matter for the Papua New Guinean government.³

¹ See Premdas (n.d.:20) and Davis (1974:9)
² Post-Courier 5 December 1974
³ See Post-Courier 30 January 1975
Separatist demands came to something of a climax with the unilateral declaration of independence by Abaijah on 16 March 1975 at a meeting organized and attended by the various Papuan groups. The 6-8,000 people who attended (Abaijah's estimate) saw the raising of the Papuan flag, sang Papua's 'national anthem' (the song 'Papua') and heard speeches by Papuan separatist leaders. Abaijah, in a parody of the annexation of British New Guinea in 1884, produced trade items—a knife, calico, tobacco, ship's biscuits and an axe—saying 'Take them back, Australia—we wish you well, but we are free now and we claim our own land for ourselves'. The items were subsequently delivered to the Australian high commissioner but neither the Australian government nor Somare took much notice of the event. During the celebration of Papua New Guinea's independence, proclaimed on 16 September 1975, Abaijah was in Australia and Mopio called on Papuans to boycott the celebrations.

Another joint demonstration was organized in May 1975 when Australia's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator Don Willessee was confronted at Port Moresby's international airport by a group of twenty-five Papuans, led by Abaijah, who carried placards saying 'Papua is not for sale' and 'No U.N. colonialism for Papua'. Willessee escaped through a back door but the following day Abaijah, Mopio and Kavua massed about three hundred Papuan separatist supporters outside the Papua Hotel where Willessee was dining with top government officials. The protestors eventually withdrew with a promise that Willessee would discuss the group's grievances with a delegation the following morning. When Willessee failed to keep this appointment the protestors walked to the Australian high commissioner's residence where Willessee was holding talks with a group of expatriate farmers. On being admitted to see Willessee, Abaijah read the Papuan unilateral declaration of independence and the delegation then withdrew without discussion.

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1 Post-Courier 17 March 1975

2 See Post-Courier 18, 19 March 1975. Following the announcement of the of the intended declaration, however, Somare did retreat somewhat from his earlier rejection of a referendum on Papuan separation, offering a referendum—if (which was very unlikely) the House of Assembly requested it (HAD III(44), 10 March 1975, p. 5676.)
Three months later, at a rally in Port Moresby, Aiajia announced plans for the establishment of a central council of Papuan states, to be representative of the six Papuan Provinces, and said that this would ultimately become the government of Papua. She also spoke of Papua Besena plans to infiltrate all elected bodies in Papua, as well as the public service, police and army. 1

Support and opposition

It is difficult, especially in view of the informal structure of Papua Besena to measure the extent of its following. Assessments differ.

Initial support came mostly from within the Central Province, particularly the Port Moresby area. 2 Without doubt it drew on a widespread fear among Papuans – especially those around Port Moresby and in areas where there are large numbers of New Guinean plantation labourers – that the inflow of New Guineans would sooner or later turn Papua into a ‘refugee camp’. New Guineans, especially the growing number of unemployed migrants from the highlands, were seen as a threat to Papuan social life, to the safety of Papuan women, and to Hiri Motu as the lingua franca of Papua. 3

In this context the riot which took place in Port Moresby in July 1973 following an annual Papua versus New Guinea football match (won by Papua) probably did a good deal to strengthen support for Papua Besena. As news of the riot spread, armed villagers began to flow in to the city but were turned back by police aided by some prominent Papua leaders. Aiajia organized a march of Papuan men, women and children to show contempt for the New Guinean rioters but this was called off by police, who according to Aiajia (personal communication) created all the disturbances themselves. Various writers have suggested that Papua Besena activities were a major factor contributing to the riot and certainly there was a good deal of

1 Post-Courier 18 August 1975

2 One recent critic (McKillop 1976:20) has described the impact of Papua Besena as 'a remarkable exercise in protecting and even strengthening the power base of the educated coastal elite of the Central Province'.

3 On the specific question of 'pidgin imperialism' see Aiajia as reported in Post-Courier 2 November 1973.
New Guinean antagonism directed towards Abaijah. However, Chatterton, observing that there was a similar riot after a football match in 1968, has said:

The close similarity of the two riots discounts the claim that the second one was provoked by Miss Abaijah's Papua Besena movement. At the most it may have been a minor contributing factor. But if the movement was aimed at Miss Abaijah's movement, its most likely effect will have been to strengthen it.

In a specific reaction against highlanders, in November 1976 following a fight between highlanders and Rigo people in Port Moresby the Papua Besena council supported a call by Abaijah for the repatriation of highlanders to their own provinces.

Papua Besena also seems to have been identified, in its early years, with opposition to independence, and probably picked up some support in this way from conservative rural villages. During 1973 Abaijah made several promotional tours to different parts of Papua and by the end of the year she claimed to have the support of 80 per cent of Pauans and said that the proportion was increasing daily. Abaijah has said:

I do not recall any village area of the hundreds I have visited that has ever opposed my meeting. Wherever somebody opposed what I am saying or there is a professional agitator at the meeting placed there by Government, then I always take a vote and in every case the one or two isolated from the rest of the people. In the two years there are two or three occasions on which I did not take a vote, because some vigorous agitator was embarrassing the people who did not want to be exposed to the threats of the agitators. The only two villages that I can remember when this occurred were Boera and Kila Kila two years ago. (Abaijah, personal communication 1975).

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1 For accounts and interpretations of the riot see Standish (1973), Hegarty (1973) and Post-Courier 5 September 1973.


3 Post-Courier 9,11 November 1976.

At Boera Abaijah was confronted by Moi Avei, Somare's political adviser and chairman of the Boera Association and Hiri Hanua Development Corporation; Avei was supported by a few university students but according to Abaijah, there was no opposition from Boera villagers. Abaijah also claims to have received almost universal support in the Rigo\(^1\) and Mekeo areas of the Central Province; in the Milne Bay Province where she addressed a number of public meetings and spoke to the Area Authority, and in the Gulf and Northern Provinces.

As against this, government sources have tended to discount Abaijah's claims and Somare (1975:136) has written:

> The support she received was minimal and in some villages there was opposition. Many Motuan villages disassociated themselves completely ... The declaration of independence revealed that the Papuan independence movement has spent its force. More and more local government councils declared support for the government, and requests for district governments were received from all parts of Papua.

A series of meetings of Papuans living in New Guinea towns have passed resolutions expressing opposition to Papua Besena\(^2\) but Abaijah claims that after most of these meetings she has received personal assurances that the meetings were held solely to protect the interests of the 'expatriate' Papuans. There have also been various expressions of opposition from individuals and groups with Papua\(^3\) and opposition has come from the Anglican\(^4\) and United Churches (both Papua based); in

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1 See, however, Post-Courier 11,14 February 1975
3 For example see Post-Courier 29 January 1974 (concerning the Abau District Association); 24 June 1974 (a clan leader from Tatana village in Port Moresby); 11 February 1975 (Rigo Local Government Council); 26 March 1975 (Tapini Local Government Council); 14 April 1975 (Louis Mona, MHA for the Goilala open electorate).
4 In April 1975 Abaijah told a seminar at the New Guinea Research Unit, Port Moresby, 'The strong European colonial lobby of the Anglican Church in Papua has played a typical role of a foreigner meddling in Papuan affairs and trying to influence the political union between Papua and New Guinea'.

March 1975 it was reported that

... all churches in Port Moresby oppose the Papua Besena movement and the planned declaration of Papuan Independence .... The Reverend Gasika Gasika, Superintendent Minister of the United Church ... said three quarters of Papuan people of Port Moresby oppose Papua Besena and opposition to Papua Besena was not just in Port Moresby but throughout Papua.¹

The movement has also been criticized by meetings of Papuan university students² and condemned in a joint statement by Awei and Kabisawali leader John Kasaiwala. According to Awei and Kasaiwala, Abaijah's 'urban-based approach' meant continued exploitation of village people by foreign interests; 'as an elected member of the House, she has not given any concrete and practical assistance to the village people'.³ A similar criticism of Papua Besena was made by Bougainvillean leader Moses Havini.⁴

A particular, and important area of contention with regard to support for Papua Besena is the Southern Highlands Province. Although this Province lies within Papua (providing almost 30 per cent of the population of Papua), the bulk of its people are ethnically closer to the people of the New Guinea highlands than to those of Papua and more often speak Pidgin than Motu. According to Abaijah (personal interview 1975), 'Papua Besena's attitude to the Southern Highlands is that they are Papuans and will stay Papuans. Every Southern Highlander that I meet in Port Moresby and in the plantations supports Papua Besena and Southern Highlanders take part in our demonstrations' .... Government sources discount this claim,⁵ as do some Southern Highlanders.⁶

¹National Broadcasting Commission, News 14 March 1975; also see Post-Courier 30 June 1973 and 14 March 1975
³Post-Courier 13 March 1975
⁴Post-Courier 12 March 1975
⁵For example, see Somare (1975:136-7)
⁶See, for example Post-Courier 31 January 1974, 13 February 1975
Chatterton has summed up the situation in the following terms.¹

Not all Papuans support Miss Abaijah. There are those who agree with her in principle, but think that it's too late. As one Papuan said in Rabaul recently, "If this movement had started 10 or even five years ago I would have joined it; but it's too late now".

Then there are those who are grateful to her for highlighting the neglect of Papuan development, but don't think that political separation is the right answer.

Finally, there are those who have given their allegiance to the bung wantaim or unitary state movement promoted by the Australian Government to facilitate its own getaway. Some, perhaps, are influenced by the fact that they have a vested interest in the maintenance of the status quo, but many believe, sincerely and fervently, that this is the best thing for their country.

The fact is that we don't know what the strength of the Papua Movement is.

Despite early rumours that both the Pangu and United parties were wooing her,² within the House of Assembly Abaijah has found few friends. Not surprisingly she has been strongly opposed by the coalition government which, while expressing sympathy with Papua's economic grievances, has seen her as a threat to national unity and, before 1975, as something of an embarrassment in the progression to self-government and independence as a united country.³ The prime minister has publicly referred to Abaijah as a 'mentally-ill member',⁴ and to Papua Besena as a liklik lain (small group),⁵ though he has not taken the threat of Papuan separatism lightly. According to Abaijah (1976:18)

¹ Pacific Islands Monthly, September 1973:27

² Post-Courier 5 April, 1972

³ For an early statement of the government's opposition to Papua Besena see report of Somare's address to the National Press Club, Canberra (Post Courier 11 September 1973). Also see HAD III(29) 25 June 1974 pp 3790-5.

⁴ HAD III(44) 10 March 1975, p 5701

⁵ Chatterton (1975:284)
Police intimidation of Papuans has become widespread in Port Moresby and police take photographs and movies of people prominent at Papua Besena meetings and, at times, follow them in police cars to their homes to note where they live. Public servants who openly support Papua fear for their jobs, their postings and their promotions.

Nor has she received any support from the predominantly New Guinean United Party opposition in the House, one of whose members moved a motion early in 1974 calling on Australia to make compensation of K1,000 million if 'the uneconomic territory of Papua' were united with New Guinea, and whose leader in March 1975 deplored the timing of Papua Besena's unilateral declaration of independence.¹

Less predictably, Abaijah has received virtually no support from other Papuan members in the House - including members like Olewale (now a minister in the coalition government) who during the second House of Assembly were staunch advocates of Papua's rights.² Papuans in the coalition government have been, in fact, among Abaijah's strongest critics.³

In March 1975, following announcement of the intended unilateral declaration of independence, a meeting of twenty-three Papuan MHAs (excluding Abaijah) and twenty-seven senior Papuan government officers met to discuss the issue; they dissociated themselves from the move and expressed unanimous support for national unity. The meeting also endorsed a statement by the deputy chief minister, John Guise, which defended the government against

¹ Post-Courier 18 March 1975

² In June 1974 (after having followed a consistent nationalist line since 1972) Olewale called a meeting of Papuan members to discuss their attitude towards unity and independence with New Guinea. At first he specifically did not invite Abaijah ('Miss Abaijah is becoming emotional and we don't want that to camouflage the real issue') or members from the Southern Highlands, but this decision was reversed. He did say, however, that he and Miss Abaijah were going on different roads to reach the same destination (Post-Courier 25, 26 June 1974). The results of the meeting were not publicized.

³ See for example, Post-Courier 6, 7 June 1973, 10 January 1974, 6 March 1974, 25 June 1974
Papua Besena's charges of economic neglect and stressed the government's commitment to national unity. As against this several weeks before the declaration a meeting of about forty-five senior Papua public servants met and passed a resolution in which they said,

Because of our positions in the Papua New Guinea Public Service and fear of reprisal action by the Pangu-Led Coalition Government, we cannot sign our names, but we are Senior Public Servants who support the other Papuan Leaders who call for Papua to be an independent nation .... We have given careful consideration to the future of Papua and have reached the conclusion that we, as Papuans, have no choice but to give our full support to Papua and to help form its own government independent from Australia and New Guinea and therefore support the establishment of the Republic of Papua.

Finally it's interesting to note that, though there was certainly sympathy with Papua Besena on the part of some other 'micronationalist' leaders, apart from a few small Papuan groups such as the Koiari Association, the Nemea Landowners' Association and the Eriwo Development Association (and leaving aside the apparent antipathy between Abaijah and Kasipwalova and Avei), Abaijah has made no attempts to establish contact with them. Although in 1974 Abaijah told students that 'the basic concepts of her movement and the Mataungan Association were almost identical', she dissociated Papua Besena from the public rally attended by Kaputin and Hannett and has said

Kaputin, Momis and Hannett are three of a kind ... they want to get their own unitary independence and at the same time retain Papua as a colony for them to play with. They also hate the idea of joining up with the dominant New Guinea Highlanders and New Guinea Mainlanders without a buffer to protect them against the 'evils' of this association. They see Papua as a buffer ....

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1 See HAD III(44) 12 March 1975, pp 5771-3 and Post-Courier 13 March 1975.
3 Post-Courier 24 May 1974.
4 Personal papers, 1975.
She also antagonized Bougainvilleans in mid 1975 by presenting the newly declared independent government of the North Solomons with a bill for K4.100 million as compensation for damages caused to Papua and Papuans by Bougainville projects and policies. ¹

Papua Besena at the polls

Practical tests of the extent of support for Papua Besena came in February 1974 and January-February 1976 with National Parliamentary by-elections for the Ijivitari open electorate in the Northern Province of Papua and for the Central Regional Electorate.

The 1974 by-election for Ijivitari was occasioned by the death of the sitting member Paulus Arek, a prominent member of the second House of Assembly. Eight candidates contested the by-election, including Paulus Arek's brother Sergius, a Pangu Pati candidate, who was duly elected.²

Three candidates, Māric Epu (a former MHA and president of the Northern Province Area Authority who in 1973 described himself as Abaijah's representative in the Northern Province),³ Patterson Undaba and Paulus Mamu publicly supported the objectives of Papua Besena and were 'endorsed' by Abaijah. Mamu polled well and Undaba got strong local support but Epu got little support - despite his earlier claim that 'The whole of the Northern District supports Papua Besena'.⁴ Arek stated that he did not oppose Papua Besena, but was opposed to Abaijah (Abaijah, personal interview 1975). Abaijah claims (personal interview, 1975) that voting in this by-election was affected by a 'terrorist' campaign against Papua Besena by Pangu Pati ministers from the Northern Province, Mackenzie Daugi and Stephen Tago, and that complaints to the chief electoral officer have been ignored.

¹ See Post-Courier 18 June 1975

² The first count of votes gave the following results: Arek 1,231, Burau 964, Mamu 849, Undaba 481, Epu 403, Yariyari 375, Sumani 349, Simaga 261.

³ Post-Courier 19 November 1973

⁴ Post-Courier 19 November 1973. Since his defeat Epu has made several statements against Papua Besena.
The movement fared better in the 1976 by-election. This by-election came as a result of the creation of a National Capital Province (Port Moresby) and thus a new regional electorate, and the decision that Abaijah should represent this electorate and a new election be held for the Central Regional seat.¹ Six candidates contested by-election. These included Papua Besena candidate Mopio and Pangu Pati president Avei. Mopio's campaign was actively supported by Abaijah and in the event he won a fairly clear victory.² The election of a second Papua Besena member, as well as indicating support for the movement, strengthens the movement's leverage over other Papuan members in the National Parliament. In March 1976 the Papua Party was resurrected with Abaijah and Mopio as its parliamentary members and Abaijah has said that Papua Besena will now concentrate on winning more national parliamentary seats in the Central Province.³

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¹ This decision has been strongly attacked by Abaijah's supporters, who see it as an attempt to weaken her position in the National Parliament, given the large New Guinean population in the National Capital Province.

² First preference voting was Mopio 5,946; Dirona Abe (independent) 5,163; Patrick Avi (People's Progress Party) 4,443; Avei 3,367; Hidiae Henao (Papua Besena) 1,524; and Lahu Teu (United Party) 1,189.

³ Post-Courier 10 February 1976
Conclusion

If it is difficult to interpret the objectives of Papua Besena it is even more difficult to measure its achievements. One might have thought that the unilateral declaration of independence represented something of a climax to Papua Besena's activities, and that when no concrete changes took place as evidence of the new independence support for Papua Besena might fall away. Abaijah answers this (personal communication, 1975) by saying that the movement's objective was not to physically set up a new government but to liberate the minds of the people; whether the movement has succeeded in this it is difficult to judge but it does not appear (despite the claim of Somare (1975:136)) that Abaijah has lost support since the declaration of independence.

In more concrete terms, since 1972 the government has clearly shifted to a strategy of 'balanced development' in its general economic policy and Papua has gained from this, though the two big development proposals for Papua - the Ok Tedi copper mine and the Purari hydroelectric scheme (much of which, in any case, would be in New Guinea) - are still only proposals. Papua Besena has probably made a minor contribution to this shift. The government's decision in August 1974 to establish a Papua Task Force (later to become the Village Development Task Force and then the Office of Village Development), probably did owe something to Papua Besena activities, but it was not welcomed by Abaijah who described the move as a 'colonial stunt' and an attempt by the central government to undermine Papua Besena. (The Task Force was, moreover, initially headed by Abaijah's opponent, Avel). Indeed rather than claiming credit for such developments as have taken place to Papua's advantage, Abaijah has tended to see them as threats to the movement's influence.

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1 The immediate decision arose from a resolution of the House of Assembly, moved by a Southern Highlands member, to establish a House committee to investigate Papua's development needs. HAD III (30), 4 July 1974, pp3910-3 and Post-Courier 5 July 1974, 28 August 1974.

More recently, in the political sphere, the election of Mopio seems to have stirred the Papuan consciousness of some Papuan MHAs. In the context of discussion of the establishment of provincial government, and contrary to all previous indications, coalition government minister Gaver'a Rea (member for Moresby Coastal) and Dr Reuben Taureka (Rigo-Abau) made statements in support of a single provincial government for Papua.\textsuperscript{1} Rea said 'I will do everything in my power to prevent further moves to realize provincial governments in Papua until the real wishes of Papuans are solicited'. Port Moresby City Council welcomed these statements (while expressing doubt as to the minister's motives\textsuperscript{2}); on the other hand Papua Besena has said it would not accept provincial government and would only accept a form of government which would be run by Papuans and with Papua as a separate country.\textsuperscript{3} Yet after more than three years the movement has given little indication of how it intends to achieve this and indeed recent statements by the Papua Party, about increasing Papua Party representation in the National Parliament, seem to run counter to this objective.

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1} \textit{Post-Courier} 20, 22 July 1976. See also reports of a meeting of Papuan MHAs in \textit{Post-Courier}, 6 August 1976
\item \textsuperscript{2} \textit{Post-Courier} 2 August 1976
\item \textsuperscript{3} \textit{Post-Courier} 26, 28 July 1976; Central Provincial Government was declared on 13 September 1976 and Gau Henao has been appointed premier.
\end{itemize}}
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